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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Adelaide, Australia, to examine the role and function of parent assistants and to investigate the effects of the 1979 parent/teacher cooperative for children under 3 years of age on the parents, the teacher, and the children. Preliminary data were gathered by questionnaires sent to parents and naturalistic observation was used during the study; however, this report is concerned solely with the analysis of parental and teacher opinion as expressed in personal interviews. Results are presented for eight parent assistants, eight unrostered parents, and the teacher. Also included are data from an overall program evaluation by parents and the teacher. Findings concerning benefits and difficulties perceived by parents, the teacher's opinions, and advantages and disadvantages of the program for children are discussed. Also explored is the effect of assistants' presence on children's behavior. Practical implications of the findings for parents, teachers, and children are pointed out. Appended materials include questionnaires and statistics on parents and children in the cooperative. (RH)

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PARENTS, TEACHER AND CHILDREN:
EVALUATION OF THE PARENT-TEACHER CO-OPERATIVE,
LADY GOMRIE CHILD CENTRE, 1981

AN ANALYSIS OF PARENT AND TEACHER OPINION

BY

V. NICHOLLS, E. T. MELLOR, B. BURDON.

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JULY, 1983

Parents, Teacher and Children:
Evaluation of the Parent-Teacher Co-operative,
Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide, 1981

AN ANALYSIS OF PARENT AND TEACHER OPINION

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INTRODUCTION

The six Lady Gowrie Child Centres in Australia were established by the Commonwealth Government in the late 1930s as an experiment in "promoting optimum physical and mental health" (Ruddoch, 1966, p.4) among the pre-school children in needy areas not served by the free kindergartens of the day.

The Adelaide Lady Gowrie Child Centre (the Centre) caters for the well being of children of diverse nationalities from birth to six years through a variety of programmes, including Parent-Child-Teacher groups (teacher-led playgroups), a programme for 2-3 year olds (at commencement) and older pre-school children. Integrated day care is a feature of the Centre and occasional care is also offered. Because of the lack of similar services in Adelaide, the Centre caters for many children with special needs, some of whom are referred by other agencies.

In June, 1979, a Parent-Teacher Co-operative was formed to operate the sessional programme for the under threes. In that nursery a teacher worked with voluntary parent assistance instead of the usual two teacher unit, a method adopted out of economic necessity. Parents were advised from February, 1979 that their assistance would be sought on a rostered basis. The new programme began operating in June, 1979.

When a new programme is introduced there is always a sense of responsibility as to the effects of these innovations on those involved. The Annual Report of October 1979 highlighted the happy environment the teacher maintained in the Co-operative with the children and parents, but noted some points for and against the scheme, viz:

"Against: 1) More time taken away from the teacher's involvement with most of the children as time is taken up attending to those with behavioural problems, and in the teaching role with parents.

For: 1) Children learning to care for toddlers and babies who have come with parents on roster.....

2) Parents..... appear to have a greater understanding of child development, the planning and organisation of the nursery and have a much closer relationship with the teachers. Happily this is transferring to the home.

The main benefits would appear to be for parents." (L.G.C.C., Adelaide, 1979, p.10).

One particular problem which had been identified in the early months of the programme's operation was that ".....on those days when a child's mother is rostered, most of the children cling to mother and were less co-operative with either mother or the teacher. In time this may be overcome". (L.G.C.C., Adelaide, 1979, p.10).

Other problems included parents talking to each other (when there were two on duty, as in 1979) and the number of days the teacher had to cope by herself when the parent volunteer was absent.

As well as having the sense of responsibility mentioned, the Centre has a wide ranging charter which delineates its functions as resource and advisory, demonstration and research. With this authority, it was decided to undertake a research project to examine -

1. THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE PARENT ASSISTANTS
2. THE EFFECTS OF THE CO-OPERATIVE ON PARENTS, TEACHER AND CHILDREN
3. TO DETAIL THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY.

LITERATURE SURVEY

Parental involvement in the pre-school classroom is not a new concept but has occurred for various ideological or economic reasons, or both, in the United States of America, United Kingdom and New Zealand, and more recently in Australia. The movement was given particular impetus here in the 1970s when the beneficial results of Head Start and other overseas early intervention programmes were published.

Most studies of parents in the pre-school classroom, the bulk of which are from overseas, describe situations where the parent is a paid or voluntary extra adult. An extensive survey of the literature uncovered only three situations where the parents are teacher substitutes viz, in the Aboriginal Family Education Centres (A.F.E.C.) in Australia, the play centres of New Zealand and the nursery annexes of Coventry, England. These situations where the parents substitute entirely for the teacher differ from the nursery at the Centre, where the teacher and parent-volunteer work together. Since there have been no studies found of exactly such a situation elsewhere, an appropriate selection will be made from the reports but emphasis will be given to cases where parents are totally teacher substitutes.

THE EFFECTS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AS TEACHER SUBSTITUTES IN THE PRE-SCHOOL CLASSROOM

1. Effects on the Parents

One outcome of such involvement is the development of companionable relationships between the mothers, and fathers can also become involved (Dermy, 1979). In her study of aspects of play centres in New Zealand, McDonald (1969) reports that this companionship may deepen into friendships. Parents have also become involved with the wider community in providing social activities (Dermy, 1979).

A further benefit is the parents' gain in confidence in their own ability to bring up their children (Martin, 1969). Working in the classroom leads to an increased understanding of children and gives opportunities to compare notes with other parents. McDonald (1969) found that parents will accept advice from each other on common problems in such settings, which might have been resented at other times.

The personal development of the parent may be enhanced by these experiences. Mothers told McDonald (1969) that understanding of

children leads to increased understanding of adults and of themselves in particular. Growth in personal confidence was also reported by Grey (1969-73).

Mothers also appreciate the intellectual stimulation in the training course (McDonald, 1969; Martin, 1969). This can lead to widening horizons in the community (Dermy, 1979; McDonald, 1969; Martin, 1969) and in the workforce (Briggs, 1980).

A number of studies have reported an emotional link with the centre, including a feeling of belonging (McDonald, 1969), loyalty (Martin, 1969) and a spirit of enthusiasm (Martin, 1969). In Coventry, a feeling of dignity was generated as residents felt that they were doing something for themselves (Dermy, 1979).

A common feature of all these programmes was that the parents were carefully trained for their task (Dermy, 1979; Grey 1969-73; McDonald, 1969), although the training took a variety of forms.

It must be pointed out that not all parents may benefit from being involved in early education programmes. McDonald (1969) reports that the factual information about child development contained in introductory courses associated with involvement in play centre programmes caused some anxious parents to become self reproachful about their own child-rearing practices. This highlights the need to treat parents, as well as their children, as individuals.

2. Effects on Teachers

Very little research appears to have been carried out which assesses the effects on the teacher of parent involvement in the pre-school classroom.

In her 1980 review of her experience with parents and teachers, Mellor suggests that,

"Having parents involved causes the teacher -

- 1) to question what she is doing and be able to explain it,
- 2) to listen to parents,
- 3) to be more sensitive to people,
- 4) to see things from a parent's viewpoint,
- 5) to be more flexible and open to suggestion."

(Mellor, 1980, p.9)

Where the teachers worked with additional adults in the classroom, some writers felt that the expertise necessary to build and maintain teacher-parent relationships could not be left to chance. Training

is needed and advocated for teachers (Karnes and Lee, 1980; Wilmshurst, 1976) as well as parents (Honig, 1975; Martin, 1969; Weibly, 1979) so that both parties have the necessary skills and sense of direction to work together. A logical extension of this would be that the training of teachers who work with parents as teacher substitutes would be advisable.

Teachers are also aided in that the interaction between parent and teacher helps forge links with the whole family (Patterson & Wilson, 1978; Wilmshurst, 1976; Fountain, 1978).

Professionals have, however, argued against parent participation and their comments could be relevant to the co-operative system. They have pointed out that parents are not completely dependable or punctual, that parental authority may be weakened if the child sees the parent in a situation where they are limited by the teacher's authority, that the values and attitudes of the parent and teacher may differ forcing the parent into unnatural forms of behaviour and that the parent may "swamp" the child by over participation (Wilmshurst, 1976). None of the three accounts of situations where the parent is a teacher substitute mention difficulties to the professional - or the parents.

3. Effects on Children

The major benefit to children of parents acting as teacher substitutes in the classroom is that they have the opportunity of early childhood group experience that would otherwise have been unavailable. They benefit from social contacts with many children, group activities and the provision of a wider range of play materials than can be provided at home. McDonald (1969) reports that this increases their self-expression and helps them later to settle into schools. In her New Zealand study, however, the mothers mentioned more benefits to themselves than to their children from play centre experience.

A large number of studies have been done on the beneficial effects of parent involvement on the intellectual, social, emotional and physical development of children. This research has been undertaken, however, where parents are an additional adult in the nursery and cannot necessarily be applied to the situation where they are teacher substitutes.

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

Explanatory Note

The basic guidelines of this research project have already been mentioned, viz to examine,

1. The role and function of the parent assistants.
2. The effects of the Co-operative on parents, teacher and children.
3. To detail the implications of this study.

The information needed to answer these questions was obtained in two ways, which will be the subject of separate reports. The methods used were designed to,

1. Ascertain parental and teacher opinion about the operation and effects of the Parent-Teacher Co-operative at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide in 1981.
2. Record behavioural data through objective observations of the Co-operative in a naturalistic setting.

This report is concerned solely with the analysis of parental and teacher opinion.

PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT PROJECT

To ascertain parental and teacher opinion about the operation and effects of the Co-operative.

To expedite the collection of information, a specific set of questions was developed and are listed under the following headings -

A. THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE PARENT ASSISTANTS

1. What are the assistants' perceptions of their role?
2. Do the assistants' perceptions of their role change with time?
3. How does the teacher perceive the assistants' role?
4. Do the assistants function according to their role?
5. Evaluation of the training programme.

B. THE EFFECTS OF THE CO-OPERATIVE ON PARENTS, TEACHER AND CHILDREN

I Parents

1. What were the effects (in terms of perceived advantages and disadvantages) on the parents?
2. Did the assistants have any difficulties in their role?

II Teacher

1. What were the effects of the Co-operative on the teacher?

III Children

1. What were the effects of the Co-operative on the children (as perceived by the adults)?
2. Did the presence of the parent assistants effect their children's behaviour?

C. OVERALL EVALUATION BY PARENTS AND TEACHER

PROJECT DESIGNPILOT STUDIES, 1980

These include,

- 1) The development and trialing of a questionnaire for parents on the roster.
- 2) The development and administration of a questionnaire to identify the differences in behaviour commonly reported by parents of the children when the parent is present.
- 3) The search for an effective recording technique for the direct observation of parents and children.

THE MAIN DATA COLLECTION, 1981Part I of the Project - Interviews of Parents and Teacher

- 1) Parents on fortnightly roster were interviewed immediately after their initial experience as assistants in February (Appendix II) and in December (Appendix III).
- 2) Unrostered parents (Appendix IV) and the teacher (Appendix V) were interviewed in December.

The result of these interviews is the focus of this report.

Part II of the Project - Direct Observation

The Research Associate took an unobtrusive objective audio record in a naturalistic setting, i.e. in the normal nursery situation. The subjects were the eight rostered parent assistants and their children when the parents were present and absent. The initial observations were made in Term I and repeated in Term III.

The analysis of this material is the subject of a separate report.

THE PARENT - TEACHER CO-OPERATIVE1. DESCRIPTION AND OPERATION

The Co-operative is designed so that eight parent volunteers are each rostered once a fortnight to assist the teacher between 9.00 a.m. and 11.30 a.m. They act as a teacher substitute and can be involved with all aspects of the care and education of the children, the setting up and putting away of the equipment, the routine chores of tidying and cleaning, and where applicable, the care of an infant accompanying them (see Appendix I).

The presence of a rostered assistant at no time precludes the involvement of other parents. The Centre has an "open-door" policy and parents are welcome to come and go as they please and to observe or participate as they wish.

In a research project of this duration and magnitude, a balance had to be struck between the needs of evaluation, i.e. in holding as many factors constant as possible, and the needs of the teacher, parents and children in the Co-operative, which involve adaptation.

From the previous eighteen months experience it was decided to,

- a) maintain the fortnightly cycle of roster duty for the parents as this balanced the need of the nursery, for continuity, with the need of the parents not to be overtaxed in the long term.
- b) to establish a second roster after 11.30 to arrange for and assist with lunch. Where possible, parents whose children actually stayed to lunch were approached. This lessened the parent assistant's load and also that of the toddlers who frequently accompanied their parent.
- c) the assistants' duties included finding a replacement mother if they could not attend themselves, as well as notifying the teacher,
- d) the assistants' duties were extended to include the setting up of equipment,
- e) there was to be no break in the assistants' year. Prior to this, when an influx of student teachers raised the adult : child ratio, the assistants had taken a break. It had been found that it was difficult to re-establish the roster system after the break.

The needs of the evaluation project were considered in that,

- a) parent assistants needed to have had no prior experience on the roster. (Actually there was only one mother in the 1981 Co-operative who had been on the roster the previous year).
- b) the assistants and the children were needed to be part of the project over a period of time thus the group in the main stayed constant for the year.

2. PERSONNEL1) Children

There were 21 children enrolled during 1981 all told, but the enrolment at any one time ranged from 19 to 20.

The children's attendance was staggered - some came two days a week, others three or four. The maximum daily group size varied between 11 to 13 children.

The children's ages were all between 24 and 35 months at the beginning of the year.

2) Parents

The children's pattern of attendance limited the parents' opportunities to meet each other when bringing or collecting their children.

Not all parents in the Co-operative were available to participate in the roster, e.g. some were in paid employment, had language difficulties, study commitments etc. This reduced the potential roster pool to eleven and, of these, the first eight asked agreed to participate.

Of these eight, four were in part-time employment and four were accompanied by younger children.

Some pertinent background statistics are to be found in Appendix VI.

All of the parents involved in the Co-operative were aware that a research project was being undertaken although not of the details of the project. All parents had given their written consent for themselves and their children to be involved in the project, although one parent requested that photographs not be used.

3. TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

Orientation Session

The week before first term commenced, the mothers on roster were asked to come to a meeting with the Director and the teacher in charge of the Co-operative who spoke to them about their role and responsibilities in the nursery. The meeting was kept "low key" to avoid "swamping" the parents with information and had a strong emphasis on reassurance and encouragement. Not all mothers were able to attend.

The parents were also loaned a 10 page booklet, Helping in Early Childhood Centres by Jean Waters (Australian Preschool Association Inc, 1979).

Some of the parents who were rostered later in the fortnight were also able to spend a morning watching the children from observation booths.

Learning on the Job

1) From the Teacher

The teacher made a policy of encouraging the assistants to involve themselves in aspects of the programme in which they were most comfortable. At the beginning, they generally chose the more routine duties and, as they gained confidence, they were encouraged to participate in other activities.

The teacher was a model for the parents on which they could base their attitudes towards and expectations of the children. Where specific guidance was needed or requested, the teacher would explain the purpose of the activity and use the opportunity to talk about the children's capabilities.

2) From the Programme and Timetable

The teacher's programme for the week was posted beside the parent roster so that parents could inform themselves of the purpose behind the morning's activities.

3) From Notices in the Activity Area

The teacher prepared a notice for each of the activity areas e.g. drawing, puzzles, dough, painting, home corner and book corner, which outlined what to do and gave some idea of what to expect at this stage of development.

AN EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIVITY NOTICE

DOUGH

1. Limit to 4 children - 5 maximum.
2. One piece of dough/child.
3. Encourage leaving dough in one piece when child has finished activity.
4. Don't make anything for child to copy.
5. Don't expect child to produce object.
6. Cutters and rollers not always necessary, particularly if dough is new.

4) From Personally Initiated Reading

The Parent library was available to all who wished to consult it.

4. PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE

A critical aspect of the Co-operative system is that the roster works. This means that there has to be enough parents with children in this Co-operative who are available to work on the roster and the relief list. It also means that the assistants have to attend as regularly as possible to provide continuity and stability for both children and teacher.

In the 1981 enrolment period the Director ensured that there would be sufficient parents to work on the roster. Parents were essential to the programme.

Of the eight parents who undertook roster duty at the beginning of the year, six continued throughout the year. Two withdrew for personal reasons not related to their involvement and were replaced by one mother from the relief list and one who had been involved during the previous year. For the purpose of reckoning the attendance no differentiation has been made between rostered parents and relief or replacement parents.

Attendance was high, varying between 84% and 94% of the days the Co-operative was in session. This represents an investment of some 355 hours of voluntary effort.

TABLE 1

ATTENDANCE OF PARENT ASSISTANTS, 1981 (From the Teacher's Roll)				
	Term I	Term II	Term III	Total
No. of possible days	54	51	55	160
No. of days attended	51	43	48	142
No. of days without assistant	3	8	7	18
<u>% OF DAYS ATTENDED</u>	<u>94.4%</u>	<u>84.3%</u>	<u>87.2%</u>	<u>88%</u>

The teacher stated that the attendance was excellent and that adequate notice was usually given and a replacement found by the assistant when she could not be present. On the rare occasion when no message came through, other parents were willing to stay to assist.

A comparison of attendances in 1980 and 1981 (see Table 2) shows a similarity in pattern of attendance between the two years, i.e. highest attendance during Term I, lowest in Term II and up again in Term III. This annual variation could be explained in health related terms, with winter being the worst time for illnesses.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF PARENT ASSISTANT ATTENDANCE, 1980-81				
	Term I	<u>% of Days Attended</u>		Total
		Term II	Term III	
1980	74.5	62.5	68.9	70
1981	94.4	84.3	87.2	88
Increase	19.9	21.8	18.3	18

However there is an increase of 18% in attendance in 1981 that cannot be explained so simply, particularly as the winter term is the period of greatest increase.

Three possible reasons for the increase in attendance might be suggested,

- 1) the Director's initial strong emphasis on the important role played by the assistants and their responsibility to attend or find a replacement themselves, was effective. (See p.9(c))

- 2) the parents were making an increased effort because of their awareness of the evaluation project
- 3) the group composition in terms of individual personalities of the assistants may have been different.

If the parents were making a special effort for the evaluation project, one would expect the highest attendance when the nursery was most obviously being evaluated, i.e. in Term I and one week in Term III, and a drop in Term II; yet in Term II the increase in attendance is greatest. This argument makes the second reason (i.e. that the parents were making an increased effort because of their awareness of the evaluation project) untenable.

This line of reasoning would suggest that the parents' greater knowledge and acceptance of their responsibility to attend or a difference in group composition in terms of individual personalities were more likely the reasons behind the marked increase in attendance, aided, probably in Term II, by uninterrupted service. (See p.9(e))

RESULTS

Results are presented for eight parent assistants, eight unrostered parents and the teacher.

A. THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE PARENT ASSISTANTS

1. The Assistants' Perception of Their Role and the Change in This Perception Over Time

The following table indicates the assistants' expectations of their role at the beginning and end of the year. It will be noticed that,

- 1) There is a greater proportion of specific comments at the end of the year.
- 2) There is a wider range of responses at the end of the year.
- 3) The emphasis has shifted from supervision and domestic activities at the beginning of the year to involvement with the children in small groups or specific activities by the end of the year, although domestic activities are still important.

TABLE 3

<u>ASSISTANTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR ROLE</u>		
<u>Expectation</u>	<u>Number of Mentions</u>	
	<u>Feb. 1981</u>	<u>Nov. 1981</u>
General supervision	5	4
Small group activity e.g. story/game	0	4
Helping children with activities e.g. collage	3	6
Cleaning, tidying and putting away	4	3
Preparing materials	0	1
	12 (48%)	18 (60%)
Non-specific comments e.g. "assisting teacher", "helping with children"	8 (32%)	10 (33%)
Non-related comments	5 (20%)	2 (7%)
	25	30

Non-Related Comments (from Table 2)

- a) One parent commented each time that there were more children than the teacher could handle alone and in December expressed her opinion that "more than 4-5 children to one person were too many".
- b) The four remaining comments at the beginning of the year all indicated the mothers had some uncertainty with their role. These same parents commented in December on their growing familiarity with routines as the year went by and therefore being able to anticipate what the teacher wanted, e.g. "I don't have to be asked".

N.B. The reactions the parents felt when asked to work on the roster varied in degree of acceptance from "happy" to "didn't mind".

2. The Teacher's Perception of the Assistants' Role

The teacher specified the scope of the assistants' tasks as

- general supervision e.g. toileting, getting children ready for a.m. tea
- small group activity e.g. story, game
- helping children with activities e.g. collage
- cleaning, tidying and putting away
- helping children in difficulties
- discipline, reminding children of nursery rules
- preparing materials

3. Do the Assistants Function According to Their Role?

- a) The assistants felt that they had carried out their duties satisfactorily.

Five assistants qualified their answers, one without giving a reason. Two felt that they had been more helpful as the year progressed because of their greater knowledge of what was expected of them and of the children in routine matters. Greater ease in relationships and more realistic expectations developed as the parents became acquainted with the children. Four qualifications concerned difficulties that the parents had experienced and will be listed later. (See p. 22)

- b) The teacher felt that all parents had been helpful. She commented that different personalities responded to the demands made on them in different ways and remarked that, "....those who interacted well with the children and were sensitive to their needs and were interested fulfilled their role the best".

4. Evaluation of the Training Programme

a) Pre-Job Training

Three parent assistants would have liked more intensive training, five would not.

Of these who did not desire further training, one qualified her answer. She was not interested in more training for her assistant's role but would be interested "to go further". Those who did desire further help suggested several possible additions to the training which they felt would be helpful,

- i) observing an experienced mother in action (1),
- ii) discussing the booklet given to them in a group led by a qualified leader (1),
- iii) further instruction in the physical and social development of children in that age group (1),
- iv) knowledge of the teacher's goals (1).¹

The teacher reported that more observation sessions might be helpful, with perhaps a simple set of questions to complete, e.g. "What did the teacher do?", to guide the observer. This would also enable the parent to see how children interact at that age and to see that other children behaved like their own! She stressed the need for the training to be non-threatening, feeling that if it were too structured, some parents might be "scared off".

b) "On-the-job" AssistanceTABLE 4

<u>TEACHER AID TO PARENT ASSISTANTS</u>	
	<u>No. of Mentions by Assistants</u>
She provided a model of child management	6
She taught practical skills	1
She gave them directions	3
She offered advice	2
She was "easy to get on with"	2
	—
	14

No one could suggest any further ways in which the teacher could help them, although one assistant again expressed the desire to see another mother in action.

B. THE EFFECT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE ON PARENTS, TEACHER AND CHILDREN

Parents mentioned e.g. benefits or difficulties in answer to a range of questions, not just those designed to solicit such responses. The results presented throughout this section collate these comments.

I. PARENTS1. Benefits

TABLE 5

<u>WAYS IN WHICH PARENT ASSISTANTS FELT THEY HAD BENEFITTED</u>	
<u>Benefits *</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
<u>Assistance with the parenting role</u>	
Learned from teacher's model of child management	3
Insights into behaviour of children that age	5
Helped parent-child relationship for child to see parent there	1
Saw own child's progress	2
Saw own child in a wider context	1
Shared common experience with the child	2
<u>Intellectual</u>	
Learned about Vietnamese children and adults e.g. cultural customs	1
<u>Social</u>	
Social contact with staff	1
<u>Personal</u>	
Felt at home in the Centre	1
Enjoyed it	3
Constructive use of time	1
Roster system makes contribution to nursery easier	1
	—
	22

2. Social Contactsa) Between parents (both assistants and unrostered parents)TABLE 6

<u>AVERAGE NUMBER OF PARENTS KNOWN</u>			
	<u>In Feb.</u>	<u>In Dec.</u>	<u>Increase</u>
By Parent Assistants	4.3	9.6	5.3
By other parents (3 of whom were new to Centre)	2.1	8.3	6.2

- 50% of the rostered parents stated that they had come to know other parents through e.g. committees, social functions, bringing children at the same time and being in the same parent/child/teacher group playgroup etc. not through the roster
- Three rostered parents and three of the unrostered parents served on committees or worked on other rosters.
- One unrostered mother found the roster system a means of getting to know other mothers. The only four mothers she knew were those on the roster.

b) Relationship of Parent Assistants to the Teacher

Seven parents spoke warmly of their relationship with the teacher, e.g.

- ".... a relaxed, pretty open relationship"
- "(it has) been a pleasure to work with her she has taught me a lot"
- "wouldn't have wished for a better person I've been very happy"
- "(she) has been helpful and understanding to me personally. I think she does an excellent job"
- "(the relationship) was enhanced because I came on a regular basis and got to know her better"

One parent was more conservative - "fairly satisfactory (she) is all right to work with".

3. Disadvantages to the Parent Assistants

None. (Potential disadvantage was mentioned by one parent if she had not been released from the roster after the breakdown of her marriage. At that stage in her life roster duty increased her personal stress about her parenting role. The final withdrawal however was due to study pressure).

4. Difficulties Experienced as Assistants

- 50% of the parent assistants mentioned difficulties in answer to this question.
- The total number of difficulties mentioned throughout the questionnaire is summarised below.

TABLE 7

<u>DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY PARENT ASSISTANTS</u>	
<u>Difficulty</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
<u>Personal</u>	
- Reluctance to "push myself"	1
- Pressure of family responsibilities	1
- Illness	1
- Post marital separation tension	1
- Anxiety over political implications of parents assisting as teacher substitutes - possible deterrent to future funding	1
<u>Younger Children</u>	
- Coping with younger child	3
- Arranging for toddler to be minded	1
<u>Enrolled Children</u>	
- "Clinging"	1
- Lack of co-operation	1
<u>Training</u>	
- Lack of teacher training	1
	—
	12

The teacher stated that the presence of younger children made it difficult for mothers to satisfactorily fulfil their role, particularly as sometimes a mother had to leave early because an overtired toddler was crying.

II TEACHER

1. Benefits

- Close relationship with mothers on roster. (This was emphasised by the teacher).
- Ideas from parents.
- Assistants usually reliable in classroom when given a specific task.

2. Disadvantages

- Uneven load of responsibility.
- Continuity dependent on one person.
- Lack of interaction with another professional in the nursery.
- Children came to her over every upset at the beginning.
- Had to cope with whole group when mother occupied with toddler.

III CHILDREN

Results are presented here for the parent assistants, unrostered parents and the teacher.

1. Benefits

1) Parent Assistants' Opinions

Seven parents felt their children had benefitted by being in the Co-operative in the following ways -

TABLE 8

<u>WAYS IN WHICH ROSTERED PARENTS SEE THEIR CHILDREN BENEFITTING</u>	
<u>Benefits</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
Child enjoyed parent being there	4
Helped child to settle	1
Linked family and programme	2
	7

One parent also mentioned the benefit of pre-kindergarten experience to the toddler accompanying her.

2) Unrostered Parents' Opinions

Five parents felt that their children had benefitted from being in the Co-operative. One did not answer, one was undecided and the other did not know as she had not experienced another such group experience.

TABLE 9

<u>WAYS IN WHICH UNROSTERED PARENTS SEE THEIR CHILDREN AS BENEFITTING FROM THE GROUP</u>	
<u>Benefits</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
* Rostered parent has assisted child	1
* Child gets to know other mothers	1
Learned discipline	1
Eating and drinking improved	2
Toileting improved	1
Learned to play with other children	2
* Less jealous (found that other mothers relate to children other than their own)	1
Provided needed company	1
	—
	10
* Items exclusive to the Co-operative system	

N.B. Five unrostered parents felt that their children related at least reasonably well to the mother on roster. Two could not express an opinion and one stated that her child went to a few and avoided some.

3) Teacher's Opinions

- Children getting to know other mothers.
- Children linking children to parents.
- Confidence in relating to assistants helped the children relate to other adults.

2. Disadvantages1) Parent Assistants' Opinions

50% of the assistants felt that their children had been disadvantaged in some ways at some time when they were on duty.

TABLE 10

<u>DISADVANTAGES TO ROSTERED PARENTS' CHILDREN</u>	
<u>Disadvantages</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
When unsettled, parent's presence increased the problem	1
Jealous - of mother attending to other children	1
"Plays up" sometimes	1
"Clings" - particularly in early months	1
	4

2) Unrostered Parents' Opinions

Five of the unrostered parents did not feel that their children had been disadvantaged. Three were non-committal.

One parent reported that her child felt that she should be there too.

One child told a parent assistant that he felt "left out" because his parent was not coming. ².

3) Teacher's Opinions

- The children's experience was less rich than with two trained personnel.
- Less time was spent by the teacher with individual children or small group work.
- Children with special needs did not get as much attention.
- Attention division required by teacher sometimes a problem (i.e. overall supervision of the group while interacting with individuals or small groups). The actual time spent directing or prompting assistants was not detrimental to the children.

- Discretion was required in talking about children to assistant so the teacher had to fall back on her own resources in coping with difficulties as they arose in the nursery. She missed the on-the-spot consultations with another professional.

3. Effect of the Assistants' Presence on Their Children's Behaviour

- 1) Six assistants said that their children's behaviour had been affected at times by their presence and for the worse.

TABLE 11

<u>CHANGES IN CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR WHEN PARENT ON DUTY</u>	
<u>Change</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
Demanding attention	2
Jealous	2
Resistant to nursery custom (special allowance sought because mum's here)	2
Over-reacting to difficulties	1
Clinging	1
Seeking parent's attention rather than the teacher's	1
	-
	9

The teacher agreed that the children had been quite demanding of their parents' attention at first.

- 2) In all cases the parents reported that the child's behaviour did improve.

TABLE 12

<u>WAYS IN WHICH THE ASSISTANTS CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR IMPROVED WITH TIME</u>	
<u>Improvement Mentioned</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
More secure - leaves mother to play with other children	6
Accepts parent only staying certain days	2
Less jealous	1
	-
	9

- 3) The teacher attributed the improvement to
 - increasing maturity,
 - acclimatisation to being in a group,
 - the regularity of the mother's attendance,
 - the extra length of time spent in one group.
 (See p.10(6))
- 4) At the end of the year some children still had occasional outbursts of being demanding.
- 5) The teacher did not observe other children copying the demanding behaviour.
- 6) Parents had been able to give sufficient time to children other than their own as the year went on.
- 7) Parental reaction to the above behaviour varied
 - accepting (2)
 - mildly angry (1)
 - embarrassed (2)
 - annoyance followed by a philosophical attitude (1)
- 8) Parents coped with their child's behaviour in different ways,
 - firmness in supporting the teacher's discipline
 - minimised the importance of the misbehaviour
 - reassured
 - explained
 - reasoned
 - "saved cuddles for her"
 - showed that the behaviour was unacceptable
 - let the teacher take over
 - co-operated with the teacher on a release routine (child makes his own decision to separate)
 - distracted the child
 One parent could not state how she coped.
- 9) The following table compares the effectiveness of the various parental coping techniques.

TABLE 13

<u>EFFECTIVENESS OF PARENTAL COPING TECHNIQUES</u>		
<u>Problem Reported</u>	<u>Effective</u>	<u>Coping Technique</u> <u>Ineffective</u>
Demanding attention	1. * Firmness in supporting teacher's discipline 2. Minimising importance of misbehaviour ("don't play them up")	
Jealousy	1. Minimised importance of misbehaviour	2. Reassured, explained "saved cuddles for her"
Resistant to nursery custom - sought special allowances	2. Let the teacher take over	1. Showed behaviour unacceptable (led to tension) 2. Reasoned
Over-reacting to difficulties	1. "Don't know"	
Clinging	1. Co-operated with teacher on release routine - child makes his own decision to separate	1. Distracting child - he quickly learned to resist
Sought parent's attention rather than teacher's	1. "Don't know"	
* Number refers to parent.		
N.B. Two parents tried more than one way to cope with a particular problem		

C. OVERALL EVALUATION BY PARENTS AND TEACHER

1. Assessments of the Co-operative

TABLE 14

<u>RATING THE CO-OPERATIVE</u>			
<u>Main Comment</u>	<u>Rostered Parents</u>	<u>Unrostered Parents</u>	<u>Total</u>
Success	6	4	10
Enjoyed it	1	0	1
Essential to keep nursery open	1	0	1
Good idea	0	2	2
Didn't have much to do with it	0	1	1
All right	0	1	1
	8	8	16

The teacher also felt the Co-operative worked effectively.

2. Why the Co-operative was Perceived to be a Success

1) Assistants' Reasons

TABLE 15

<u>WHY THE CO-OPERATIVE WAS A SUCCESS</u>	
<u>Comment Made</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
<u>Benefits to Parents (45%)</u>	
Parents develop greater understanding of how to relate to other children	1
Got to know other mothers better. Enjoyed being part of team	1
Good relationship between parents and teacher	2
Other mothers welcome to stay - "no one schooled away"	1
Enjoyed it - happy to be in it	2
Assisted parents in parenting role	2
<u>Benefits to Children (25%)</u>	
Children happy	1
* Good for children because sharing a common experience with parent	1
* Allows more consistency in parent behaviour and discipline	1
Children need adult attention (particularly Vietnamese-Day Care)	1
Own child needed mother a lot of the time	1
<u>Functioning of the Co-operative (30%)</u>	
Teacher needed help - without it no Parent-Teacher Co-operative	4
Roster has "worked well because parents have worked well because they though it was worthwhile"	2
	20
* Applies only to children of assistants	

2) Unrostered Parents' Reasons

TABLE 16

<u>WHY THE CO-OPERATIVE WAS A SUCCESS</u>	
<u>Comment Made</u>	<u>No. of Mentions</u>
<u>Benefits to Parents (65%)</u>	
Parent involvement good for its own sake	1
Parents learn management of their own children	1
Parents learn management of groups of children	2
* Gives insight into function of the kindy	3
* Gives insight into children of this age group	2
* Brings parents closer to teacher	1
* Enjoyed it the times I relieved (twice)	1
<u>Benefits to Children (12%)</u>	
* Helps parent relate to child	1
* Nursery child centred, "not a mothers' meeting"	1
<u>Functioning of the Co-operative (24%)</u>	
* Parent attendance good	1
Helps teacher	2
* Nursery well run	1
	17
* One of the two relief mothers involved in each case	

3) The Teacher's Reasons

- Emotional and social gains to all involved were of prime importance, particularly in the parent-teacher relationship.
- The parents learned much of child development and behaviour.
- The personal development of the parents.

3. Comments and Criticisms Made by the Participants1) CommentsBy Three Parent Assistants

- Advocated the roster system as an end in itself rather than a response to a need (3).
- A similar system could be used to give assistance in the office or toy library (1).

2) Criticisms(a) By Three Parent Assistants

- Only those on roster benefitted in the parenting role.(1)
- Those with time had to "carry" working parents.(1)
- Would be more permanent for the children with another teacher there (qualified by "...they have to relate to different people in life and they can learn to do it here".(1)
- The successful functioning of the Co-operative "...could be used politically to justify lower funding levels".(1)
- There was a need for sufficient funding so that the parents could be truly voluntary.(1)
- Because of the load the teacher carried in counselling and working with parents, an aide (paid) would be an asset to the nursery.(1)

(b) By an Unrostered Parent

- The assistants "...tend to take over too much for the child and my child tends to rely on them".

(c) By the Teacher

- Stress factor in running the Co-operative tiring - would recommend breaks from this type of work, e.g. after three to four years.

DISCUSSION

The results that have been presented are for a relatively small sample. Conclusions drawn from these results must therefore be tentative.

A. THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE PARENT ASSISTANTS

The parent assistants showed a wider understanding of their role as the year progressed. (See Table 3) There was a change in emphasis which indicated a greater confidence in interacting with children e.g.

- general supervision received the greater number of mentions in February
- helping children with activities was most frequently cited in December, followed by small group activities.

By the end of the year, too, the parents' expectations of their role more closely approached those of the teacher, (see Table 21), which suggests that experience and "on the job" training increased the parents' understanding of the scope of their work. It was noticeable that "helping children in difficulties" and "discipline" within the group were evidently regarded by the parents as the teacher's responsibility. More specific encouragement appears to be needed in these two areas as, by the end of the year, the parents should have been familiar enough with the children and nursery routines to assist the teacher with these behaviour management tasks.

All the people interviewed indicated that the parents had functioned well in their role. The assistants regarded experience as being basically important in their success, whereas the teacher emphasised the importance of the parent's personal qualities. However the two points of view are not mutually exclusive.

If the personal qualities of individual parents are important, the possibility arises that someone might be asked to serve on the roster who proved unsuitable from the teacher's point of view or who themselves found the work unsatisfying. The present system caters for a parent's withdrawal where necessary, but an overt two way system (teacher or parent initiated) could be an advantage, perhaps becoming operational after a specified time. Guiding a parent's skills into a more congenial form of participation rather than the roster would prevent loss of self esteem or a sense of failure. In the same way that not all adults find teaching appealing, some parents may also find from experience that teacher substitution has its disadvantages for them. It is a different role from parenting and it is important that the parent be suited to the role.

The Co-operative system as it functions in one nursery in this Centre was in its infancy at the time of this study. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that one parent expressed a desire "to go further". Such an interest might well lead to a subsequent career, as has been found elsewhere (see p.4). Likely avenues of training could be in teaching and child care or, less formally, in Family Day Care - or serve as an introduction to leadership in playgroups.

Although the majority of assistants found their "training" satisfactory for the task, some constructive suggestions were made by the parents and teacher for improving this even further, particularly in familiarising the assistants with their role in the nursery. Guided observation of children in groups using the Centre's booths could be useful and would be possible if the mothers from the previous year assisted in the new year for a period, or if future assistants observed at the end of the year preceding their period of service.

B. THE EFFECTS OF THE CO-OPERATIVE ON PARENTS, TEACHER AND CHILDREN

1. PARENTS

1) Benefits

The most frequently mentioned way in which parent assistants saw themselves as benefitting was in the insights they gained into their role as parents. 75% of the benefits cited fell into this category.

When Tables 5 and 8 are compared, it can be seen that the assistants mentioned more and a wider range of benefits to themselves (22) than to their children (7). These findings support those highlighted by McDonald (1969).

While a number of studies have suggested that one benefit of parental involvement is the companionship gained from such involvement, only one rostered parent mentioned social contact as a benefit and that contact was with the staff member. (See Table 5). This is probably because only one parent was rostered at a time and she was too busy to spend much time relating to other parents. However both rostered and unrostered parents increased their circle of acquaintances as the year went on (see p.21). The apparent advantage of the unrostered parents is reversed if allowance is made for the newcomers at the Centre, since the number of parents one gets to know during a year is

influenced by the number of parents not known at the beginning. If this is taken into account, rostered parents got to know slightly more parents.

Either way the difference is not great, suggesting that the system is usually only mildly helpful in assisting parents to get to know one another and would need to be supplemented. Indeed, 50% of the rostered parents specifically stated that they had not come to know other people through the roster but by other means of involvement in the Centre. The teacher can play a role here, too, in being alert to social needs and introducing parents to each other.

The roster system was, however, very successful in helping the parent assistants and teacher to form good working relationships (see p.21 and 23). This would greatly enhance the effectiveness of their teamwork and emphasises the importance of the personality and leadership skills of the teacher.

2) Difficulties

All the assistants distinguished between the "difficulties" they experienced in carrying out their task and the strong word, "disadvantaged". None felt disadvantaged - although one saw this as a danger if she had continued (p.22), a reminder that the parents' needs must be considered as well as those of their children. Ten (10) difficulties, however, are specifically mentioned (see Table 7), the biggest and most diverse group of which can be designated "personal" (42% of the mentions). "Coping with younger children" was the most frequently mentioned of all the difficulties and this was the only difficulty mentioned by the teacher. Four of the assistants brought younger children with them and were totally responsible for their care in addition to their other duties. At times this care excluded them from more than a superficial involvement in the nursery programme, e.g. when the infant had to be fed, changed, or put to sleep, thus throwing more responsibility on to the teacher. Occasionally, as the teacher pointed out, the assistant had to leave early due to the demands of the younger sibling. If these younger children had been excluded, the difficulty parents would have had in arranging alternative care would probably have led to their withdrawal from the roster. Toddlers were welcomed, therefore, as a matter of policy.

It is interesting to note that, although six assistants felt that the behaviour of their enrolled children had, at times been adversely affected by their presence (p.26), yet only two mentioned this as a difficulty to them as assistants, which speaks well of the ability of the team to cope with such situations.

2. TEACHER

The Co-operative's main purpose was to continue to provide group experience for the children in the younger age bracket (2-3 years at the beginning of the year). It was recognised from the start that working with a variety of parent assistants placed an extra load of responsibility on the teacher.

The teacher mentioned three ways in which she considered that she benefitted and five in which she considered that she was disadvantaged, but placed greater emphasis on certain aspects. Predominantly she benefitted on the level of personal relationships with the parent assistants (see p. 23). Establishing and maintaining good relationships with the parents is part of a teacher's role and, clearly, she felt that this process was facilitated by the roster system. She felt disadvantaged by the lack of a permanent professional assistant (see p. 23) and day to day continuity, although she appreciated the efforts of the parents.

It is relevant to mention at this stage that, at an earlier discussion (18.3.81), which had arisen after a particularly trying three days in the nursery when several children appeared to need comfort which involved perpetual physical carrying, the teacher felt that it was significant that, at the seminar she was attending that night, she had selected the workshop on the "Reduction of Stress to Teachers and Child Care Workers". Obviously from her point of view, the perceived disadvantages of the Co-operative system were posing a problem for which she needed to actively seek a solution.

The teacher suggested that the period any one professional runs such a Co-operative be limited (p.31). This type of compromise is not new in educational circles and has generally been found effective.

It should be noted, too, that this teacher was one of a diverse team working in a multi-unit complex which includes secretarial staff. If she had been interrupted and absent from the room for phone calls and other administrative matters, the situation would have been

exacerbated. Moreover, personal, educational and legal difficulties would have arisen if an untrained adult was left in charge. The teacher worked in the Co-operative for half the day and worked with a professional assistant in an afternoon pre-school session for older children. This system provided relief from the particular stress and lack of professional stimulation which could result from full time participation in a Co-operative type system.

3. CHILDREN

(a) Advantages

88% of the parent assistants and 63% of the unrostered parents felt that their children had benefitted by being in the Co-operative (see p. 23 and 24).

86% of the benefits to the children perceived by the assistants were connected with improvements in the parent-child relationship and were therefore directly related to the presence of the parent. (See Table 8). Further, all of the benefits mentioned by the assistants were relevant to the child's experience in the Co-operative system.

70% of the benefits to the children perceived by the unrostered parents would be expected from any group experience with a trained professional combined with the normal development of the child. (See Table 9)

It would appear, therefore, that parents who are involved are more aware of benefits related to the Co-operative system, i.e. they can discriminate between changes due to maturity, group experience or group experience involving the parent in a systematic manner. This would suggest a growing understanding of child development (see p. 3) and the educative process which is less developed in the unrostered parent.

The majority of the unrostered parents (63%) felt that their children had related at least reasonably well to the mothers on roster (see p.24). Only one reported any negative experience. Personality dissonance will occur in any group but one advantage of being in the Co-operative is that it provides a variety of people to whom the children can relate.

It would have been advantageous to ask this question of the assistants. As it stands, their children's relationships with

their own parents are explored in some depth, but not the child's relationship to other mothers on the roster.

The teacher felt that positive adult-child relationships were the most beneficial aspect of the Co-operative to the children. Each of the three benefits she mentioned is linked to this theme (see p.24). Further, she had seen the confidence generated by this experience generalise to other adult-child interactions.

(b) Disadvantages

Half of the parent assistants mentioned some disadvantages to their children as a result of this parent participation on the rostered day. All the disadvantages were directly related to the presence of the child's own parent in the nursery and were, therefore, only a problem once a fortnight (see p.25). The nature of these problems will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Although no unrostered parent perceived her child as having been definitely disadvantaged, there were two reports of difficulties relating to their own absence from the nursery (see p.24).

The teacher considered that all the children were disadvantaged in that their experience was basically less rich and less individual than in a nursery with two teachers. The teacher's attention was more divided and her decisions lacked the input of another professional. She was in a sound position to make this assessment, having worked in the same nursery with another teacher in charge and then experienced a mid year change to the Co-operative system when she became the teacher-in-charge, still with the same group of children.

All of the differences in educational experience mentioned by the teacher are endemic in a system which incorporates rostered, untrained personnel. Even if the assistants had been fully qualified professionals, the discontinuity arising from their being on roster would make a difference from an educational point of view. If their relative lack of training and experience is also taken into account, the education in the Co-operative must be different from that in a two teacher nursery. The question to be considered, then, is whether

the difference is so great that the children would be better advantaged by staying at home. Since 88% of the adults, including the teacher, felt positively towards the Co-operative system, (p.29) it would seem that they were satisfied with the educational standard there and with the teacher's efforts.

(c) The Effect of the Assistants' Presence on Their Children's Behaviour

The only disadvantages of the Co-operative system to the children previously mentioned by the assistants appeared to be related to the parents' presence in the nursery (see p.25). This was indicated by 50% of the assistants.

When the assistants were specifically asked about the effect of their presence on the children, 75% perceived changes for the worse (see Table 11); 25% of the adults, therefore, (75% less 50%) did not regard the change as so great that it constituted a disadvantage.

One parent had already mentioned a positive change ("helping the child to settle" - see Table 8) but did not reiterate it in answer to this question. This might have been an oversight or possibly part of the question (9(d) - "How did you cope?") set the tone of the answers - if the parents read ahead on the questionnaires.

The only effect mentioned by the teacher was negative - i.e. that the children were "quite demanding".

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that if the child's behaviour does change when the parent is present it will usually be for the worse and the changes will relate to the child's difficulty in adapting to the parent in this new role. (See Table 11). The improvements in behaviour over a period of time which were noted by all the parents showed the children's adaptation to the situation (see Table 12).

Demanding behaviours, when they occurred, could have been quite disturbing for the rest of the nursery but this does not appear to have been the case, possibly because only one child was affected each day and the same child only once a fortnight. Nor did the other children model their behaviour on the child being disruptive (see p.27). Further, the assistants managed to give attention to their children after an initiation period.

Many parents, when asked to participate in nursery or class-room activities express concern over the behaviour of their own children. These findings may reassure parents that they are not alone with this problem and that, if they persist, the child will adapt. It may also be encouraging to realise that they are not alone in coping with a negative reaction within themselves to the child's behaviour. 66% of the parents in this survey felt mildly negative in this situation (see p. 27).

There appears to be, however, more than just persistence needed on the mother's part if the child is to be helped to adapt. If the parents' coping techniques are considered in relation to the behaviour problem and reported effectiveness of the technique (in terms of improvement with time), an interesting pattern emerges (see Table 13). It can be seen from this table that the effective techniques involve less attention being given to the children when they misbehave than the non effective techniques. This is also too small a sample to draw definite conclusions from such results, but it is in line with the finding of reinforcement studies in which attention given to particular behaviour has been found to increase the likelihood of that behaviour recurring, while decreased attention leads to the behaviour being less likely to occur. The teacher's support of the parent was also a relevant factor.

A similar method of cross comparison was used to examine the parents' emotional reactions to the undesirable behaviour with the reported modification of that behaviour. No relationship was apparent between the two. It may be then, that it is not how parents feel but how they act that is important - which gives them more control over the situation. This hypothesis could repay investigation.

C. OVERALL EVALUATION BY PARENTS AND TEACHER

As has been mentioned (p. 38), 88% of the adults involved expressed positive opinions in relation to the success of the Co-operative.

It is deceptively difficult to ask a person whether or not the Co-operative has been successful. This question requires parents to choose their own criteria, assess the Co-operative using those criteria and to justify the assessment. The criteria chosen by the parent can be categorised in the same way as has been done in the evaluation, i.e. whether the system worked and the effects it had on people. (See Tables 15 and 16)

Both rostered and unrostered parents placed the greatest emphasis in their answers on the benefits to parents (45% and 65% respectively). Rostered parents were more aware of benefits to children (25% of the answers) but only those unrostered parents with some relief experience mentioned benefits to children (12% of the answers). It would seem, then, that again involvement is required if the benefits to children are to be perceived (see p. 36). The functioning of the Co-operative was mentioned about equally by both sets of parents.

The benefits to parents were perceived differently by those who worked in the Co-operative i.e. the teacher and rostered parents, from the parents who were unrostered. The assistants and teacher emphasised the social and emotional benefits to parents which were also mentioned by the relief parents. The totally unrostered parents, however, emphasised benefits gained in the parenting role (See p.30). This apparent anomaly was clarified when the original answers were re-examined. Only one totally inexperienced parent spoke personally of this. The rest seemed to be speaking generally (e.g. "Parents learned" compared with "I learned") i.e. of the benefits they perceived the assistants as receiving, not themselves. At present, there is, therefore, little evidence that the bulk of the unrostered parents benefitted directly by the Co-operative system even though they were free to stay or participate as they wished.

Previously when the assistants were asked how they had benefitted, they emphasised the assistance they gained in the parenting role (see Table 5). In assessing the Co-operative, they emphasised the social and emotional benefits of the system to themselves (see Table 15). This second apparent anomaly may be understood in terms of priorities - the overall success of any activity would probably be judged in this way by those who

participated. Lack of social and emotional satisfaction may lead to withdrawal from the roster regardless of any other benefit.

As has been indicated, only the assistants and the roster relief parents justified the Co-operative in terms of the benefits received by the children. The benefits mentioned were predominantly emotional or strengthening to the child-parent relationship (see Tables 15 and 16).

The system was not without its critics - in fact those most involved were not only its warmest advocates (4 comments) but also the most frequent in their criticism (6 comments from the assistants and teacher here, but only one from an unrostered parent. See p. 30 and 31). These comments show insight and concern as well as making positive suggestions for extension and improvement.

Several parents (3) felt that a roster system was worthwhile as an end in itself rather than as a response to a need and one suggested that the idea be extended to assist staff in other areas, e.g. a roster system for the office or toy library.

From the assistants' point of view, there were some aspects of the system which evoked criticism. It was felt that only those parents who were actually assistants received special help in their role as parents from the Co-operative system. As has been seen (p.40) this was probably an accurate assessment of the situation but, for all parents to work as assistants would require careful preselection when children were enrolled. In 1981, not all parents would have been able to help (see p. 11) and, under normal circumstances, this would be true in other years. It becomes a question then of who is to benefit - the parent or the child? Children of the unrostered parents can still have group experience under a limited roster system. Some resentment, was expressed by one assistant that parents who were not in paid employment had to "carry" those who were. It is not surprising that such a comment be made, as there is a section of the community who feel very critical of "working" parents. There are however, other reasons why parents cannot assist, e.g. language difficulties and study commitments in 1981. It is also possible that some parents might feel totally inadequate and threatened in such situations. In this Centre the needs of both child and parent are taken into consideration and basically roster work incorporates an element of community giving which perhaps should be specifically brought to the parents' attention.

An extended roster would also be less permanent for the children who already have to learn to relate to 7-8 new adults. One parent has already commented on the lack of permanence that relating to the present number of assistants involves. If all parents assisted there would be even less continuity.

One parent had observed the extra workload that devolved on the teacher and suggested the employment of an aide would be an asset to the nursery in freeing parents from domestic duties so that they could assist the teacher more with the children. This suggestion is another tacit acknowledgement of the worthwhile nature of the roster system as well as a recognition of the teacher's need and a possible solution to it.

Another parent assistant had twice expressed concern that the successful functioning of the Co-operative would be used politically as a justification for reduced funding, with a consequent reduction of staff. This could have implications to older children in pre-school as well. The system of one teacher with a parent as a teacher substitute does not really lend itself to extensive application, however, e.g. -

- 1) The teacher found the situation stressful and suggested a limit to the length of service under such conditions (see p. 31). It would be logical to argue that working in such a system full time would even further reduce the length of effective service.
- 2) The system is not applicable to the education of children in day care. Parents can only assist for limited periods of time because of the needs of their own children.
- 3) The quality of education provided is different in a Co-operative as has been pointed out (see p. 37). The reduction of individual attention, in particular, would not be beneficial to those children with "special" needs. The number of such children in a group has to be carefully monitored at the best of times, and especially where there is only one professional.

The above comments, however, would not apply where the parent was an extra adult in the classroom. Her presence then would lead to an enrichment of experience and should allow the teacher more time in individual and group work.

One unrostered parent felt that the assistants were overactive in helping her child which is one of the difficulties foreseen by teachers (see p. 5). Further training and greater understanding of children's

growth and development would correct this situation which requires a fine degree of judgement of children's capabilities.

It is relevant to mention in conclusion that, from September, 1982 due to the greater emphasis on child care the Co-operative changed its structure to cater for the increasing number and needs of the children in full day care. (Annual Report, 1982, p.39). Two professional staff (a teacher and a child care worker) and a parent on roster now work together which retains the best advantages of the original experiment and at the same time relieves the strain on the solo staff member as well as catering for a larger group of children.

In 1983, an afternoon Co-operative was set up, with a professional and two parents working together, a variation of method.

The effectiveness of these new arrangements has yet to be assessed.

IMPLICATIONS

Some practical implications arising from this study can be suggested here, though tentatively, as this is a small study.

The implications are grouped under the following headings, with some overlap between the categories:

General Comments

Parents

Teacher

Children

General Comment

1. Since the Co-operative operated throughout the year with a high level of parent attendance, it would seem to be a possible alternative staffing arrangement for children of this age (i.e. under four, which is below pre-school age in South Australia).
2. With a limited number on the roster, not all parents can be involved as assistants. Some parents, however, were not able to be involved in this way, e.g. those in full time employment. Nevertheless, their children were still able to experience group situations.
3. The evidence from the questionnaires suggests that the parent assistants and their enrolled children are the main beneficiaries of the Co-operative system.

Parents

1. The rostered parents perceived themselves as benefitting from the Co-operative system mainly through the assistance they gained with the parenting role. This assistance was predominantly due to the insights gained into the behaviour of children in that age group.

This would suggest that a Co-operative type system could be beneficial as an end in itself.
2. Helping on the roster seemed to be a useful way of establishing good working relationships with the teacher.
3. The most frequently mentioned difficulties relating to roster service were coping with younger children accompanying the parent and, to a lesser extent, with the behaviour of the enrolled children when their parent was present. In some cases it may be possible for arrangements to be made for the care of these children.

4. Parents may be wary of being involved in the same groups as their children because of the difficulty the children have in adjusting to their parents' change of role. The data collected suggests that:
 - this difficulty can be overcome with time,
 - the undesirable behaviour is not copied by other children,
 - the parents are progressively freed to relate to other children as the year goes on,
 - that giving less attention to undesirable forms of behaviour and co-operating with the teacher in their management leads to the reduction of these behaviours.
5. The assistants reported that they became more involved with the children as the year went on and learned to take small groups for various activities. This would mean that the type of education available in the Co-operative more nearly approached the usual kind offered by two professionals.
6. From the suggestions and comments made by the parents and teacher, it would appear that it would be feasible to intensify the level of training provided for the assistants.

Teacher

1. The personality of the professional team member was important. The assistants appreciated the teacher's warm and outgoing nature and the friendly support of the parents was a source of encouragement to the teacher.
2. The roster system placed a great load of responsibility on the teacher, who was, at time, the only effective adult in the group e.g.
 - when parents were attending to younger siblings,
 - when parents were busy with the demands of their enrolled children,
 - when parents left early because of the needs of younger siblings.
3. The teacher had to be aware of the needs of all the children all the time, so far as that was possible, and to guide and direct the assistant.
4. Points (2) and (3) placed a strain on the teacher.
5. The teacher's comments on the difficulties associated with the numbers of children as well as parents to supervise and train, suggest that the number of children in the Co-operative should be kept low.

Children

1. The greatest benefit to children in a Co-operative system would appear to be the confidence gained in relating to adults in general.
2. The assistant's children had an additional advantage from improvements in their relationship with their own parents, in spite of some initial difficulty in adjusting to the parent in their new role.
3. The education received by the children in the Co-operative differed from that received in a group with two professionals in ways consistent with the different staffing arrangement, i.e. according to the teacher,
 - it was less rich,
 - there was less continuity,
 - there was less individual and group work.
4. Since the majority of the parents felt positively about the Co-operative, it could be inferred that they were satisfied with their children's experiences there. "Customer" needs, therefore, appear to have been met although the parents had no basis for comparison.

NOTESLITERATURE SURVEY

1. Australian studies consisted of,
 - a report on a trial programme of mothers working beside the teacher (L.G.C.C., Brisbane) by Patterson and Wilson (1978)
 - parents as volunteers are part of a report on early education classes in Queensland (Turner & Miles, 1980)
 - Nurcombe studied parent volunteers in a pre-school for aboriginal and white children (Wilmshurst, 1976)
 - parents in the classroom are referred to in studies of parent participation (Ebbeck, 1979; Mellor, 1980)
 - Grey (1967-73) has described the development of infant pre-school services for aborigines in A.F.E.C.

RESULTS

1. Either this parent was unaware that the teacher's goals were posted beside the programme or she wanted a more detailed explanation.
2. This assertion is startlingly mature for this age group and may be the assistant's adult interpretation of a child's comment.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX IPARENT-TEACHER CO-OPERATIVE TIMETABLE (FLEXIBLE), 1981

8.45	Set out equipment and materials
9.00	Greet children and parents
9.15 - 9.55	Free play (encourage indoors) (small group experiences may occur)
9.55 - 10.00	Toileting
10.00 - 10.15	Fruit and juice time
10.15 - 11.10	Free play (outdoors encouraged)
11.10 - 11.20	Group experience (songs, music, story etc.)
11.20 - 11.30	Pack away
11.30 - 11.40	Farewell children and parents
11.40 - 11.50	Remaining children quiet activities indoors
11.50	Toileting
12.00 - 12.30	Lunch
12.30	Farewell those children being collected. Remaining children outside supervised by A & B staff
12.30 - 12.45	Set out beds

APPENDIX II

EVALUATION PROJECT

L.G.C.C. ADELAIDE 1981

PARENTS ON ROSTER IN 'C' NURSERY (1st interview)

1. How did you feel when you were asked to co-operate on the roster in 'C' nursery?
2. How do you see your role as a parent aide in 'C' nursery?
What sort of things do you think you should be doing?

APPENDIX IIILADY GOWRIE CHILD CENTRE INC. ADELAIDEEVALUATION PROJECTNovember, 1981PARENTS ON ROSTER IN "C" NURSERY (2nd interview)

1. What sort of things do you think you should be doing as a parent assistant?
2. Do you think you have been able to carry out these duties satisfactorily?

Why do you think this?

3. Have you had any difficulties as a parent assistant?
4. How has the teacher helped you as a parent assistant?
5. Can you suggest any other ways in which the teacher might help you i.e. other than she has already?
6. Would you like to have had more intensive training?

If so, in what areas?

PARENTS ON ROSTER IN "C" NURSERY (continued)

7. Do you feel you have
(a) gained
(b) been disadvantaged
because of this experience as a parent assistant?
8. Do you feel your child has
(a) benefitted
(b) been disadvantaged
by your working on the roster?

In what ways?
9. (a) Do you think your child's behaviour was influenced in
any way because you were present?
(b) In what ways?

(c) How did you feel about this?

(d) How did you cope?

(e) Did your child's behaviour when you were present change
with time?
10. How do you feel about the Parent-Teacher Co-operative?
Do you think it was a success or not?
In what ways?

L.G.C.C. ADELAIDEEVALUATION PROJECTNOVEMBER, 1981PARENTS ON ROSTER IN "C" NURSERY (continued)

11. How do you feel about your relationship with the teacher?
12. (a) How many of the parents in "C" nursery did you know before you worked on roster?
(b) How many parents do you know now?
13. Do you hold any position on the parent committee at this Centre or work regularly on any other roster?

54.
APPENDIX IV

LADY GOWRIE CHILD CENTRE INC. ADELAIDE

1981

EVALUATION PROJECT

PARENTS NOT ON ROSTER IN "C" NURSERY

1. How do you feel your child has related to the mothers on roster?
2. Do you feel that your child has
 - (a) benefitted
 - (b) been disadvantagedby being in a Parent-Teacher Co-operative?

In what ways?
3. How do you feel about the Parent-Teacher Co-operative?

Do you think it was a success or not?

In what ways?
4. (a) How many parents did you know at the beginning of the year?

(b) How many parents do you know now?
5. Do you hold any position on the parent committee at this Centre or work regularly on any roster other than in "C" nursery?

APPENDIX V

LADY GOWRIE CHILD CENTRE INC. ADELAIDE

EVALUATION PROJECT

November, 1981

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER IN CHARGE OF
PARENT-TEACHER CO-OPERATIVE

1. What duties do you expect a parent assistant to undertake?
2. How do you prepare them for the task?
3. How do you assist them during it?
4. Would you like to have given more intensive training to the parent assistants?
 - (a) If yes - In what areas would you like to have seen more training given?
 - (b) If no - Why?
5. What
 - (a) benefits do you perceive to you in having parent as assistants?
 - (b) disadvantages do you perceive to you in having parents as assistants?

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER IN CHARGE OF PARENT-TEACHER CO-OPERATIVE (continued)

6. Were you satisfied with the attendance of the parent assistants?
 - (a) When they were absent, what sort of reasons were given?
 - (b) Were you given adequate notice and a replacement found?
7. Did the parent assistants behave any differently when the researcher was there, than when the researcher wasn't?
8. Could you describe the characteristics of the assistants who fulfilled their roles the best?
9. What
 - (a) benefits do you perceive in having parent assistants to the children?
 - (b) disadvantages do you perceive in having parent assistants to the children?
10. Do you feel you have been able to do as much individual work with the children as you had wished to/were used to doing?
11. Have you been able to give as much attention to referred children as you would like to?
12. Do you feel the parent assistants were able to give sufficient time to other than their own children?

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER IN CHARGE OF PARENT-TEACHER CO-OPERATIVE (continued)

13. Do you feel the parent's presence affected their children in any way?

If so, in what way(s)?

14. Do you feel the time spent by you giving direction or prompting to the parent assistant was excessive/detrimental to the children?

15. What are your feelings about the effectiveness of the Parent-Teacher Co-operative? Why do you feel that way?

APPENDIX VI

STATISTICS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN THE CO-OPERATIVE, 1981

(a)

<u>LENGTH OF CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUP EXPERIENCE</u>			
(In months, excluding holidays)			
<u>Months of Experience</u>	<u>Parent on Roster</u>	<u>Not on Roster</u>	<u>Total</u>
None	1	5	5
1 - 6	5	5	11
7 - 13	1	1	2
13 - 18	1	2	3
	—	—	—
	8	13	21

(b)

<u>MOTHER'S NATIONALITY</u>			
<u>Nationality</u>	<u>On Roster</u>	<u>Not on Roster</u>	<u>Total</u>
Australian	8	9	17
Papuan	0	1	1
Vietnamese	0	2	2
English	0	1	1
	—	—	—
	8	13	21

(c)

<u>TWO PARENT FAMILIES (at 1.2.81)</u>			
<u>No. of Parents</u>	<u>Parent on Roster</u>	<u>Not on Roster</u>	<u>Total</u>
Two parents	8	10	18
Separated	0	1	1
Single	0	2	2
	—	—	—
	8	13	21

STATISTICS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN THE CO-OPERATIVE, 1981 (continued)

(d)

MOTHER'S EMPLOYMENT SITUATION (April, 1981)

	<u>Parent on Roster</u>	<u>Not on Roster</u>	<u>Total</u>
Employed full time	0	2	2
Employed part time	4	0	4
Student	1	1	2
Home duties	3	10 *	13
	<u>8</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>21</u>

* One mother was waiting to return to work

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